



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
MAINE STATE HARNESS RACING COMMISSION
28 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

AMANDA E. BEAL
COMMISSIONER

May 2, 2019

Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
Senator Jim Dill, Chair
Representative Craig Hickman, Chair
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0100

RE: LD 1590 "An Act To Amend The Laws Relating to Harness Racing"

Dear Senator Dill, Representative Hickman and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee Members, I am writing neither in support nor against LD 1590. The Maine State Harness Racing Commission ("Commission") provides oversight and support for Maine's harness racing industry. In particular, the Commission is working hard to find strategies to improve the long-term economic viability of harness racing in the state. The Department offers the following comments with respect to the subject matter of this bill:

- LD 1590 arose from horsemen in response to long-running uncertainty over the future of Scarborough Downs, whose lease expires in 2019. It is unclear whether racing will be conducted at Scarborough Downs in 2020
- In 2019, 44% of the harness racing days are scheduled to occur at Scarborough Downs
- Sufficient racing opportunities throughout the year are required to justify investments in race horses by their owners
- Uncertainty over the future of Scarborough Downs in recent years has served to deter investment in race horses and to attract new owners
- Scarborough Downs is the only track that races in March, April and December

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- A vibrant commercial track within the easy access to the population centers in York and Cumberland Counties is critical to the continuation of harness racing in Maine
- The May 2012 "Report of the Committee on the Future of Harness Racing in Maine" stated that "racing facilities with a clean, pleasant environment with good food and beverage service" are one of the most important factors for attracting new fans
- The prevailing industry consensus is that the continuation of harness racing in Maine is largely dependent upon the existence of an updated commercial track in Southern Maine with aesthetics and amenities sufficient to attract new patrons

The Commission is appreciative of the contributions of Maine's current commercial tracks to the industry. While uncertainty still exists with respect to the future of a commercial Southern Maine race track, it appears momentum is building toward either renovating Scarborough Downs or eventually building a replacement should the current owners cease operations. Either alternative would be of vital importance to the continuation of harness racing in Maine.

Sincerely,



Henry Jennings
Executive Director
Maine State Harness Racing Commission